

ON THE NEW PAHLAVI DOCUMENTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

In two articles<sup>1</sup> A.B. Nikitin has deciphered numerous Middle Persian ostraca from various finds in South Turkmenistan.

Despite his meritorious efforts, the author has not convinced me of the correctness of all his readings. Therefore, I would like to offer to professor G. Bongard-Levin, in this Felicitation Volume, a modest contribution, which, although not dealing with his very large field of research, yet may bring renewed documentation about the Sasanian Iran.

Concerning Nikitin's first article, I do not want to discuss his proposal that these ostraca are from the casting of lots, in which no less than fifteen individuals participated. Nikitin *a priori* believes that we have to do with proper names, but that is not necessarily the case on most of the ostraca.

I think that many of his readings have to be rejected, either for paleographical reasons or because of the unacceptable interpretations they entail. In my opinion, many graphemes should be read as figures rather than letters, so that at least at first sight, these documents are dealing with economical matters.

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<sup>1</sup> A. B. NIKITIN, "Srednepersidskie ostraki iz buddijskogo cvjatilšca v starom Merve", in *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* (=VDI) 1992, pp. 95-101; A. B. NIKITIN, "Middle Persian Ostraca from South Turkmenistan", in *East and West* 42 (1992), pp. 103-129. In this second article the author has inserted the 18 MP ostraca already published in the VDI article.

All the items of Nikitin's first article are inserted in the second one, which contains twenty documents in addition to the ones in the first one.

In the following discussion I will not read those ostraca whose reading is too problematic.

### 1. *The VDI Article*

**Nos.1-3 (= *East and West* p. 121 nos. 19-21):** According to Nikitin, these nos. are from one and the same text.

On no. 1, -z't is not possible, but we must read: -twm. twsk is also not plausible.

I propose :

line 1: plḥwtwm Y farroxtom ī

KYN'/KYN(?) 3 gōspand sē

In no. 2: Nikitin has *bwlḥt*...as a proper name; I read:

line 1: B'YḤWN Y xwāh ī

2: ḥmk K[YN'] hamāg gōspand

In no.3 I read: 1-100 ZWZN sad drahm

Translation: "The most prosperous sheep, three (in number), ask for all (these) sheep for a hundred drachmas".

**Nos 4-6 (*East and West*, p. 121 nos. 22-24):**

No.4: Nikitin's *Gar'ōdmān* is impossible, because religious subjects are not expected on such a document! This word must be written with a *t*, not with *d*, and the *m* is not legible. Tentatively, I would propose to read: (p)lwlšn = parwarišn: (for) "nourishment".

No. 5: read: YDH Y MN dast ī az

No.6: line 1 yzd'nwyh<sup>2</sup> Yazdān-weh

2: YḤBWNt dād

Nos 4 - 6 combined may mean: "The hands of Yazdān-weh gave food" (?)

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<sup>2</sup> For the writing of *yzd'n*. see D. WEBER, *Ostraca, Papyri and Pergamente*, Textband, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, Part III vol, IV, London, 1992, n 127: P. 116, Taf. p. 229.

The proper name can easily be explained as "Good thanks to the gods".

**No.7 (*East and West*, p. 121-122 no.25)**

*Kirdīrān*, as read by Nikitin, is possible, but I prefer, because the *y* is not bound to the following *l*, the following interpretation:

krt Y lw[.....

kard ī Rō[...

"made by Ro[z-weh ?]"

**No.8 (*East and West*, p. 122 no.26):** illegible (perhaps : Y m.... (a patronymic)

**Nos 9-10 (*East and West*, p. 122 nos. 27-28)**

As Nikitin has well understood, the first line of no. 9 is exactly the same as that of no.10, on which the first letter is missing. My reading of these two similar ostraca:

no.9: 1. [K]H̄DH ḥl Y

hammis xar (?) ī

2. d'yl(m)n

Dēlamān

"all together asses from

Dailaman".

no.  H̄DH ḥl Y

hammis xar –

2. ḡl'n

Gilgilān

"all together asses from *Gilgilān*"

It is not sure that "asses" are actually mentionned here, as we would expect the ideogram \*HMR'. We can also interpret this word as *har* "all", the merchandise not being indicated.

Both the geographical names can be in situation, because they belong to the Eastern regions of Iran, close to Central Asia.

Gilgilān is attested as *Gēlgēlān*, arabic *Jīljlān*, on a silver plate from the Ermitage<sup>3</sup>.

**No. 11 (*East and West*, p. 122 no. 29)**

1. tl'kwyl̄

Tarrāg-weh(?)

2. d't zlt(k')

dād zartak

"Tarrāg-weh gave saffron"

**No. 12 (*East and West*, p. 122 no. 30)**

1.

2. yzd'nwyl̄

Yazdān-weh

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PH. GIGNOUX, "Eléments de prosopographie: II. Les possesseurs de coupes sasanides", *Studia Iranica* 13 (1984), p. 24 no.7.

**No. 13 (*East and West*, p. 122 no. 31)**

This inscription is certainly a numeral, not *Sāsān* as proposed by Nikitin, as the grapheme begins with two *s*'s: it is the numeral  $70+1=71$ , perhaps followed by the ideogram Z[WZN].

**No. 14 (*East and West*, p. 122 no. 32)**

Nikitin has: *Māhdād*.... The end is very probably --d't, but the beginning can be better read as *yzd'n*: *Yazdān-dād*<sup>4</sup>.

**No. 15 (*East and West*, p. 123 no. 33):** too blurred to be read.

**No. 16 (= *East and West*, p. 119 no. 16)**

Because of the circle on the right above the first line, and another circle at the end of the same line, this document is certainly of economical contents, as seen by Nikitin, but some of his readings seem inaccurate: for example, *dykl* is clearly wrong.

I read as follows:

- |                      |                         |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. MN ywlt'k ZWZN 4  | az jōrdā(g) drahm cahār |
| 2. [ 'P]m MKBLW[Nt?] | u-m padirift            |
| 3. (l'd) ḤṬ ZK.....  | (rāy) agar ān           |
| 4. M[N ?].....       | [az]                    |

"of grain, four drachmas; and I received

Nikitin (*East and West*, 16) added *MN* at the end of the second line, but I can see no trace of it. Also *xwāhēd* in the third line would not be written thus, but \*B'YḤWNyt as on ostracon no. 2.

**No. 17 (*East and West*, p. 120 no. 17)**

- |                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. MN 'LH             | az ōy                |
| 2. ... 2-100-20 ŠN[T] | ..... dō sad ud wīst |
| "From..... Year 220"  |                      |

The second line is probably a date, but the era remains problematic.

**No. 18 (*East and West*, p. 120 no. 18) :** illegible.

I have no confidence in the reading proposed by Nikitin.

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<sup>4</sup> cf. PH. GIGNOUX, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, II/2, p.192 no. 1062.

2. *The East and West Article.*

## No. 1

Nikitin's reading has to be rejected because it is out of question that such a text would be dealing with a sinner committed to prison !

I propose the following interpretation:

*right column:*

- |                        |                   |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1.....                 |                   |
| 2. nk'skl              | nigāhgar          |
| 3. L'/l'd pṭ' ztšn     | nē/rāy pad zadišn |
| 4. NKSȚ' YHYTYWN't     | xwāstag āwarād    |
| 5. monogram or tamgha? |                   |

"Let the surveyor bring (this) wealth without breaking it (lit. smiting) !"

*left column:*

- |                               |                        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. ZNH DKY['] PWN             | ēn pāk pad             |
| 2. mgwpt BR' I'dynytn'        |                        |
| 3. [']p' {y}t Y YDH/GDH 'pzwṭ | mowbed bē rāyēnīdan    |
| 4. ....MN bwl[cm...           | abāyēd ī xwarrah-abzūd |
| 5.....                        | .....az Burz-...       |

"This <jar> must be purified by the Mowbad, whose xwarrah is increased, . ....from Burz-..."

If my reading is correct, this inscription is particularly interesting, since an unknown function of the Mowbad is attested here, that of cleaning objects like the jar brought to him by the *nigāhgar*.

## No. 3

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. NKSȚ' [L]    | xwāstag "         |
| 2. 'twrmtr'     | Ādur-Mihr         |
| 3. ŠNT 21       | sāl wīst ud ēk    |
| 4. 'YT (23).... | ast (wīst ud sē?) |

"The property belongs to Ādur-Mihr, year twenty-one (of the Yazdgird era ?)....."

No. 4: illegible.

## No. 5

*right column:*

- |           |             |
|-----------|-------------|
| 1. ....   |             |
| 2. Y 'twr | ī Ādur/ādur |

3. [']p't Y GDH	ābād ī xwarrah
4. (BR') MNW MN bwl[c?...] ]	(bē)kē az Bur[z-...]
5. b'pyn Y yzdkrt	Bābēn ī Yazdgird
6. YK'YMWNšn	ēstišn
7. ....[YI	
8. bwlcm't'n	Burz-midān
9. zywndk	zīndag
10. (YK'YMWN't)	ēstād

".....of fire (of a proper name ?) whose xwarrah is prosperous, which must remain thanks to Burz-(mid) (and) to Bābēn son of Yazdgird..... Let .....son of Burz-mid be living! ]

The proper name Burz-mid could come from av. *bərəzi-mita*- "high-build"<sup>5</sup>.

left column:

1. l'd....	rāy
2. B'YHWN...	xwāst
3. dl(y)w-	Driyōš
4. Y ....	ī

#### No. 6

This text probably contains many numerals.

1. ....
2. d't 100-40-2 (or 4 ?) ZWZN dād sad ud cehel ud dō drahm  
“(He) gave 142 drachmas”

#### No. 10

1. ....
2. d't'wḥrmzd'n Dād-Obnnaздān
3. Y tylwyḥmn Y ī Tīr-Wahman ī
4. m'ḥk' Y gw'yłk(?) Māhag ī.....
5. Y lsk' ī rask
6. “..... son of Dād-Ohrmazd, Tīr-Wahman son of Māhag, .....

#### No. 13

1. bwicn' LWTH ..... Burzan abāg
2. pṭ m..... pad ....
- 3.....

<sup>5</sup> cf. J. DUCHESNE-GUILLEMIN, *Les composés de l'Avesta*, Paris, 1936, p.20, §26: “*bāti haut*”.

- |                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 4. 'L lšn [YW]M W... | ō Rašn rōz ud.... |
| 5. YNS(BWN)t         | stad              |
| 6. ḤS 3              | may sē            |
| 7. ZWZN              | drahm             |

"Burzan with ..... on the day Rašn, he took wine, (for) three drachmas".

#### No. 34

I do not think that we have here a list of personal names, as asserted by Nikitin. This ostrakon is rather a letter, if my reading, at the end of the second line, of *nc* = *namāz* is correct<sup>6</sup>. It is very strange that lines 6-7 and 8-9 repeat the same wording.

- |                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. np[št?][']L.... | nibišt(?)      |
| 2. Y .....nc       | ī namāz        |
| 3. bwlcn' Y š..    | Burzan ī Š.... |
| 4. ....            |                |
| 5. Y .....         |                |
| 6. P<WN> ḤS        | pad may        |
| 7. P<WN> ḤS        | pad may        |
| 8. pylw[c]         | Pērōz          |
| 9. pylwc           | Pērōz          |
| 10-11. ....        |                |

"written to xy son of yy, salutation ! Burzan son of Š.... for wine, Pērōz...."

#### No. 35

The reading of Lukonin *apud* Nikitin is correct : *lšnmt[r]* = *Rašn-Mihr*.

#### No. 36

- |                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. ....                 |                    |
| 2. ....                 |                    |
| 3. ['py]sp'lyt ŠM       | [ābe]spārēd nām    |
| 4. ...' BRH 'p'nlt .... | ...pus Ābān-rad... |
| 5. 'yl'n MT''n          | Ērān dehān         |
| 6. ....                 |                    |

"..... he commits (himself ?)....xy son of yy, Ābān-rad.... Irān villages.."

<sup>6</sup> On this formula see D. WEBER, *Ostraca, Papyri und Pergamente*, cit., p. 213.